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U.S. Releases 4 and East Bloc 25 In Spy Exchange on Berlin Bridge

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, June 11 — The United States today freed four East Europeans imprisoned on espionage charges in exchange for 25 Western agents who had been held prisoner in East Germany and Poland, State Department officials announced.

The exchange was described by one State Department official as "the biggest spy swap" in memory. It was carried out at 1 P.M. Berlin time on the Glienicke Bridge, which crosses the Havel River and connects West Berlin and East Germany, the scene of famous East-West exchanges in the past.

No Americans were involved in the exchange, but a Justice Department official said many of those freed by the Communists had been "of interest" to the United States, apparently suggesting that they had worked for American intelligence or for other Western intelligence agencies in collaboration with Washington.

A Justice Department offical said that the United States, in the three years of discussions leading up to today's secret exchange, had sought to include the Soviet dissidents Andrei D. Sakharov and Anatoly B. Shcharansky but "we were told that the Soviet Union would not consider their release."

"After it became clear that the Soviets would not change their position," he said, "we decided that obtaining the release of 25 persons and family members was an important humanitarian step which justified the agreement."

The operation was coordinated on the American side by Richard R. Burt, the Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, who secretly broke away from Secretary of State George P. Shultz's party in London last weekend to fly to Berlin. Television cameras were allowed on the Glienicke Bridge to record the transfer and Mr. Burt was seen surveying the scene before it took place.

Only 23 of the prisoners held in East German or Polish custody crossed into West Berlin today. The two others "wished to remain behind out of concern for personal business and the welfare of family members," a Justice Department official said. But the East Germans have agreed that they will not be subject to further imprisonment and can leave for the West within two weeks if they choose.

"Furthermore," the official said, "it has been agreed that family members of all 25 persons who wish to do so will be allowed to join them within a short time. We believe a number of family members may take advantage of this possibility."

The United States declined to make public the names of those freed by the Communist authorities "in order to protect the interests of the persons concerned," a Justice Department official said.

"In the interest of the privacy of these people, who have gone through quite a lot and need some rest, I am not going to reveal their current whereabouts," he said.

'Inhuman Treatment' Charged

One of the 25 was interviewed on West German television in Giessen, where East Germans who come to the West are processed. He identified himself as Gerhard Suss. He said he had been imprisoned for 13 years and had been systematically tortured by the jailers. He said he was speaking out to protest "this inhuman treatment."

The four freed by the United States were flown secretly by Air Force plane to Tempelhof Airport in West Berlin on Monday night and taken to the bridge this morning.

This is how a State Department official at the scene described the transfer:

"After it was verified that the 25 Europeans were present on the East German side of Glienicke Bridge, the four were moved in a van to the Glienicke Bridge. We had the opportunity to meet with all 25 individuals on the East German side of the bridge and to interview them and ascertain their intentions and desires. When those individuals were interviewed, they were told that they had the right to come across the bridge.

"A bus was brought up to the middle of the bridge and the 23 who wished immediately to come to the West were able to leave the bus and boarded the American bus that we had brought up. Once that exchange took place, the four individuals under our custody were brought up and released to the custody of East Germany."

Initiated by East Germany

The exchange was initiated by the East Germans, a Justice Department official said, and involved Wolfgang Vogel, an East German lawyer who has been a part of many publicized and unpublicized cases. His most famous exchange took place in 1962 and involved Gary Powers, the U-2 reconnaissance pilot shot down over the Soviet Union, in return for Col. Rudolf Abel, a Soviet agent, who had been convicted of espionage in Brooklyn.

Mr. Vogel was seen greeting the four released today as they crossed into East Germany, news agency reports said.

A West German source was quoted by the West German news agency D.P.A. as having said that of the 23 who came to the West today, 17 were Germans. But it was not made known whether they had been West German or East German citizens originally. No other breakdown was provided.

The 4 Freed by the U.S.

These are the four people released by the United States:

¶Marian W. Zacharski, a Polish businessman convicted in California on Nov. 16, 1981, on one count of conspiracy to transmit information relating to the national defense of the United States and sentenced to life imprisonment on Dec. 14, 1981. He had been charged with buying secret information dealing with an antitank missile and radar technology. He was granted executive clemency in connection with the exchange.

¶Alfred Zehe, an East German physicist, who pleaded guilty last Feb. 21 in Massachusetts to eight counts of espionage and was sentenced to eight years' imprisonment and fined $5,000. He was involved in buying classified information from a source who was working with Federal authorities in supplying material not damaging to the national security, according to information presented in court. He was released by the court for the exchange.

¶Alice Michelson, a 67-year old East German woman, who pleaded guilty on May 31 to helping agents of a foreign country obtain classified documents and was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment. She was arrested last October at Kennedy International Airport in New York as she was about to board a plane for Czechoslovakia with a tape recording of secret United States information hidden in a cigarette package.

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